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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE

THE MAINTENANCE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM'S INDEPENDENT STRATEGIC NUCLEAR CAPABILITY

Note by the Secretary

1. The Chiefs of Staff have approved (1) the report (2) at Annex A and have agreed (3) that it should be held to form a part of the further consideration they will have to give to this subject, when the outcome of current Ministerial discussions of Defence Budget targets is known.

B G T STANBRIDGE
Air Commodore
Secretary
Chiefs of Staff Committee

Annex:

A. The Maintenance of the United Kingdom's Independent Strategic Nuclear Capability. (27 pages)

Notes:

1. COS 23rd Meeting/73, Minute 110.
2. DP 26/73 (Revised)(Final).
3. COS 21st Meeting/73 Item 1.

Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall SW1A 2HB

7 November 1973

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ANNEX A TO
COS 40/73

THE MAINTENANCE OF A UNITED KINGDOM INDEPENDENT STRATEGIC NUCLEAR CAPABILITY

INTRODUCTION

1. In 1972 a number of inter-related studies on the subject of the United Kingdom's independent strategic nuclear deterrent were completed and a memorandum (1) containing our advice was offered to Her Majesty's Government. Since that advice was offered a number of changes to the circumstances concerning the recommendations have occurred and the Chief of the Defence Staff instructed the Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Policy) to re-examine the subject (2).

AIM

2. To examine the recommendations made (3) to maintain an independent national strategic nuclear deterrent capability which would satisfy the most recent JIC assessment (4) and also to examine the advice offered to HMG in November 1972 on this subject (1) and to consider whether, in the light of the changed circumstances, both are still valid.

BACKGROUND

Rationale

3. As part of the studies concerned with the maintenance of the United Kingdom's independent strategic nuclear force, in April 1972 we restated (3) the case for maintaining a UK strategic nuclear force and reviewed the need to retain an effective nuclear deterrent in the longer term. The conclusions of our paper (3) relevant to this study were as follows:

> "The main justification for the possession of a nuclear deterrent is to provide the ultimate guarantee of national security and sovereignty, and to protect national interests where conventional defences are no longer effective. Without it, the United Kingdom has no means of its own of deterring nuclear attack or large-scale conventional aggression by a

Notes:

1. S of S' MO 18/1/1 of 6 November 1972.
2. CDS 1141/5 dated 3 October 1973.
3. COS 45/72 dated 25 April 1972.
4. JIC(A)(72)30.

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nuclear power, and countering nuclear blackmail. We would view such a situation with the gravest misgivings. (para 70).

"A British deterrent force is of value in NATO in that it provides the Alliance with a European contribution to the overall deterrent, and a second centre of decision for nuclear retaliation. Other than France no European member possesses this capability. If a British deterrent force did not exist, the United States would have a monopoly of NATO's nuclear power. Conversely the necessity for such a European element becomes stronger as the American nuclear guarantee becomes progressively less credible. (para 71).

"In both contexts the value of the British deterrent depends upon the decision to use it remaining under unfettered national control, and for this to be clearly seen to be so. There is no justification for maintaining a force which is purely an adjunct to the United States' deterrent and the use of which is entirely under American control. Our present dependence on the United States for material assistance, and our reliance for intelligence, does not amount to control. (para 72).

"It is difficult to show that possession of a nuclear deterrent confers on Britain any special status world-wide. But it is unquestionable that our position in NATO and in Europe would be very different if we were not a nuclear power. It would be undesirable for France to be the only such power in Europe. (para 73).

"As to the level of effectiveness required:

a. The force, and its systems of control, must at all times be able to remain effective in the face of pre-emptive attack. The alternative would be to place absolute reliance on the factor of warning time. (para 75).

b. It must be capable of inflicting on Soviet Russia a level of damage which Soviet leaders would regard as unacceptable as the price for an aggression on the United Kingdom or her European allies. This level was defined in 1962 as the equivalent of the destruction of the five largest Russian cities. Although we have no reason to doubt the continuing validity of this criterion, we consider that it would now be timely to obtain comment

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on certain specific points. (para 75).

c. Our assessment of the likely development of the Soviet defences (taking into account such limitations as may arise from a SAL agreement) leads us to conclude that we shall be unable to maintain this criterion in full unless our strategic nuclear force has the ability to penetrate to and strike certain targets within the Soviet defensive system, by whatever means, and that whatever the development of Soviet defences, this ability to penetrate must ensure for us an ability to strike what the Soviets themselves must regard as crucially worthy of defence. It thus becomes the principal criterion of effectiveness in considering the level of threat we should pose." (para 75).

JIC Assessment (4)

4.

5.

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b.

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4.
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c. RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3(4)

d. RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3(4)

e. RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3(4)

f. RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3(4)

Advice to HMG

5. In November 1972 the options under study for improving the deterrent were:

a. SUPER ANTELOPE - the existing A3T POLARIS System modified by an improved British re-entry system and warheads.

b. UK POSEIDON - POSEIDON C3 missiles (including a MIRV capability) with British warheads.

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c. HYBRID (later renamed STAG) - POSEIDON C3 missile, improved British warheads as in SUPER ANTELOPE and a re-entry system based on SUPER ANTELOPE technology.

6. As a result of the studies (6) we submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of State who then forwarded it to the Prime Minister with his comments (1). The conclusions of the memorandum (para 39), were as follows:

"We conclude:

a. If Ministers confirm their intention to maintain the credibility of our strategic nuclear deterrent force in the national role, there is an urgent need to improve its penetration capabilities;

b. All three options for improvements - SUPER ANTELOPE, UK POSEIDON and HYBRID - would provide the penetration capability required.

c. On the basis of present estimates the HYBRID would in cash terms cost less in the long run. During the period of the LTC however the HYBRID would be more expensive.

d. The political difficulties which the US would probably face over the supply of POSEIDON with its MIRV capability and its relative cost make UK POSEIDON the option least worth pursuing.

e. The HYBRID has operational, technical and logistic advantages over SUPER ANTELOPE but its estimated costs are more difficult to accommodate in the earlier years.

f. The Defence Secretary has made clear that subject to final decisions on the strategic nuclear options he will expect additions to be made to the defence budget in the relevant years. The implications of these additional costs for the public expenditure programme as a whole will need to be studied. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has reserved his position.

Notes:

1. S of S MO 18/1/1 of 6 November 1972.
6. POPC 19/72(Final) 7 September 1972.

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g. Subject to Ministers' views on the options, the next step should be to open discussions with the US Government, as soon as they are able to respond, in order to secure as much further authoritative guidance as possible on which to take a final decision between the HYBRID and SUPER ANTELOPE. The aim should be to take this decision as early as possible in 1973.

h. In the course of these discussions we should need in particular to confirm US readiness to help us with development and production of the HYBRID; and, in the context of logistic support for the two options, to seek further information on how long the US intend to keep POLARIS and POSEIDON missiles in service.

j. There would be advantage in informing the French Government, at the earliest possible stage, of at least the broad outline of our plans. Our aim should be to persuade that the measures to improve the POLARIS force would not prejudice collaboration on a successor system and to elicit from them information on their own plans.

k. Since SUPER ANTELOPE work would be largely common with the HYBRID initially, and since it would be an acceptable fall-back position if for any reason the HYBRID option could not be pursued, it is essential that work on SUPER ANTELOPE should continue at full stretch and Treasury authority has been given for the necessary commitments until the end of the financial year.

l. For the longer term, if Ministers wish to continue to maintain a credible national strategic deterrent in the form of a permanently available second strike capability, a replacement submarine force armed with appropriate missiles is considered to be the only feasible option.

m. Before such a programme could be taken further considerable effort would have to be devoted, with the aid of industry, towards clarification and definition of the project.

n. The size and pace of commitments even in this phase would depend on the choice of POLARIS improvement and on the scope for future collaboration with the US and France. It would not be prudent to proceed further until these questions are clarified during discussion in the next few months."

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7. In the advice tendered to HMG it was stated that, if decisions were made in time, a continuous patrol of one SSBN armed with SUPER ANTELOPE Improved POLARIS missiles could be maintained from mid 1978. The times for the other options was stated to be early 1980.

Developments Since November 1972

8. By May 1973 discussion with US Authorities indicated that the STAG would be technically more difficult and potentially more costly than previously thought. This development was reported (7) to Ministers together with a new US offer - OPTION M (a suitably deMIRVed POSEIDON missile system with a UK development of the Mk III POSEIDON warhead). Thereafter it was increasingly assumed that UK POSEIDON (including a full MIRV capability) was no longer a likely option because of its attendant US political difficulty over MIRV. Thus the range of options at this time became effectively Option M, SUPER ANTELOPE and STAG. The Secretary of State reported (7) to the Prime Minister that if financial and political factors could be set aside OPTION M would provide the best military solution. STAG has ceased to be regarded as a viable option since the Ministerial Meeting of 7th May 1973.

9. For the Ministerial Meeting of 12 June, the Secretary of State reported (8) on the relative merits of OPTION M and SUPER ANTELOPE. Following this meeting, fresh enquiries were made to ascertain whether the US Government would be prepared to make a fully MIRVed POSEIDON system available to the UK. It was reported (9) that Dr Kissinger believed that the President would prefer not to have to face the Congressional difficulties that such a request would entail.

10. At further Ministerial Meetings held on 16 and 26 July discussions (9) (10) continued on OPTION M and SUPER ANTELOPE and it was made clear that discussions with the French Government showed that they regarded collaboration as a question for the longer term and that any consideration of collaboration over present improvements was not possible. It was further reported that "the development of SUPER ANTELOPE had been assessed as a technical programme of unknown but probably high risk and that there could be difficulties in supporting the POLARIS missile

Notes:

7. S of S MO 18/1 of 2 May 1973.
8. S of S MO 18/1/1 of 8 June 1973.
9. Attachment to S of S MO 18/1/1 of 20 July.
10. S of S MO 18/1/1 of 27 July.

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system uniquely for us after it had been phased out of service with the USN in the early 1980s"(9). Later in his submission to the Prime Minister prior to the next meeting on 12 September the Secretary of State reported (11) that the chances of obtaining full UK POSEIDON as in para 5b above were assessed as marginally better although the choice remained effectively between OPTION M and SUPER ANTELOPE. Regarding Option M, it was stated that after further discussion with the US, there was "no reduction in the uncertainty about the cost of developing and producing the new dispenser needed for Option M, which is the major area of technical risk in the project; we cannot begin to resolve this until we have asked for the Presidential determination needed for the release of the Mark III warhead for Option M" (11).

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Defence Expenditure

11. Since 1970 successive Defence Estimates have represented between 5½% and 5¾% of GNP. Looking a little further ahead, this trend of a comparatively stable share of GNP is broadly maintained in the years for which we have firm Defence Budget targets, though the tendency is towards a declining rather than an increasing share. By contrast with this short term stability, longer term projections suggest that manpower costs will rise at least as quickly, and equipment costs a good deal more quickly, than the likely rise in GNP. Thus the Defence programme, which is already tightly constrained by existing Defence Budget targets, is going to come under increasing pressure even if a constant share of GNP is to be available for Defence.

12. As part of the 1973 Public Expenditure Survey a number of studies have been undertaken based on LTC 1973 and aimed at indicating the consequences of having to accept lower levels of Defence expenditure. In the first instance, in order to realise short term savings in Public expenditure, a cut of £60M was imposed on the existing Defence Target for 1974/75. Further studies were completed to illustrate the consequences of having to meet two higher levels of savings (cases A and B) in the target years (12) and in particular in 1976/7 and 1977/8. These formed the basis for briefing the S of S for the current PESC discussions.

Notes:

9. Attachment to S of S MO 18/1/1 of 20 July.
11. S of S MO 18/1/1 dated 10 September 1973.
12. COS 33/73 dated 20 August 1973.

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These discussions have not yet been completed but it is already clear (13) that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is seeking to reduce defence expenditure to about 4½% of the GNP by 1977/8, or as soon thereafter as possible. It is against this background that the consequences of having to absorb unprovisioned expenditure for Polaris improvements should be assessed, although, as will be seen from Appendix 1, considerable provision has already been made whichever option is selected.

Polaris Improvement Costs

13. Appendix 1 outlines the programme costs of SUPER ANTELOPE and OPTION M over the next ten years, together with the provision in existing Defence Budget targets and in the 1973 LTC. Defence Budget targets in this paper are the updated Comd 5178, Public Expenditure White Paper figures up to 1975/6 and the MOD planning figure (14) for 1976/7. It can be seen that both options would involve excess expenditure as shown by the following summary extracted from S of S's letter to the Prime Minister (11):

£M

	LTC 1973		
	1973/4-1976/7	1977/8-1983/4	Cumulative Total
SUPER ANTELOPE	+67	-31	+36
OPTION M	+104	+96	+200

However on a through life cost basis the difference between the two options narrows to £67M in favour of SUPER ANTELOPE due largely to the increase in cost of running on SUPER ANTELOPE into the early 90's consequent upon the by then "uniqueness" of the Polaris missile.

14. S of S has placed on record (1) with his colleagues his view that improvements to the strategic nuclear deterrent should not be at the expense of conventional forces. Accordingly, the MOD have, both in 1972 and 1973, included in their claim for adjustment to Defence Budget targets any differences between the provision for

Notes:

1. MO 18/1/1 dated 6 November 1972.
11. S of S MO 18/1/1 dated 10 September 1973.
13. Chancellor of Exchequer to PM dated 10 September 1973.
14. MO 18/1/1 dated 16 November 1973.

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Polaris improvements made in the current LTC and that included in LTC 1971. The Defence Budget targets for 1974/5 and 1975/6 agreed in the 1972 Public Expenditure Survey were adjusted to reflect part of the MOD claim at that time for additional expenditure on Polaris improvements. In spite of this adjustment the Chancellor has reserved his own position on the handling of the rest of the additional expenditure and the figures agreed in 1972 constitute no guarantee that further adjustments will be agreed either in 1974/5 and 1975/6, or for later years. Indeed, all the indications are that such adjustment is likely to be strongly opposed by the Treasury.

15. SUPER ANTELOPE. This option would involve expenditure additional to the provision in the Defence Budget targets, but subsequently, apart from £1M in 1977/8, would require less than the current provision in the 1973 LTCs. As a result, if no further adjustment of Defence Budget targets is made for Polaris improvements, then some £67M will need to be absorbed at the expense of the rest of the programme in the period up to and including 1976/7. For the remainder of the LTC period expenditure on SUPER ANTELOPE is estimated to be £31M below the 1973 LTC provision.

16. OPTION M. This option involves a considerably higher level of expenditure than SUPER ANTELOPE, particularly over the years 1973/4 to 1976/7 in which £104M will have to be absorbed. Over the whole costing period expenditure additional to that provided in the 1973 LTC would be £200M.

17. Through Life Costs. As will be seen from the right hand column of Appendix 1 there is no significant difference between the Through Life Costs of the two systems.

POLARIS Improvements in the Context of Revised Defence Expenditure

18. As a further development of the LTC 73 Follow-on studies the Defence Secretariat, in conjunction with Service Departments, recently completed a study (15) showing the consequences of funding SUPER ANTELOPE and OPTION M against a background of three levels of reduced Defence targets for the years 1976/8. This study showed (illustrative consequences are at Appendix 2) that even the smallest slice of savings examined would result in a slowing down and cancellation of defence projects. Any further reductions would require a re-assessment of the UK's capability to meet non-NATO tasks and adversely affect her contribution to NATO. Furthermore there would be growing industrial effects. In the most extreme case the security

Note:

15. AUS(P & B) 209/73 dated 16 August 1973.

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and influence of the UK would be in question and a major reappraisal of current Defence Policy would be inescapable.

Implications of Absorbing Polaris Improvement Costs

19. The cost of accommodating either option of the POLARIS Improvement Programme could be met within Defence Budget targets up to 1976/7, and for the later years within the provisions of LTC 73, without a major effect on the Defence Programme. However, absorption of the SUPER ANTELOPE costs would lead to a degradation of the UK's conventional capability in the target years (1974/5-1977/8), and accommodation of OPTION M costs in these years would have greater effects broadly comparable to those illustrated in Savings Level 1, Option 2 of Appendix 2.

20. If absorption of the cost of either of the options were coupled with reductions in planned Defence Budget targets as a consequence of the current PESC discussions, a reappraisal of defence programmes would be inevitable. The severity of the consequences would obviously be dependent on the extent of the reductions and the illustrative examples of the implications at various levels are at Appendix 2. These have been assessed (15) as ranging from some slowing down and cancellation of certain projects to a major reassessment of our entire Defence Policy up to 1993/94.

OTHER CHANGES IN CIRCUMSTANCES

Forecast of In-Service Dates

21. Since the last Ministerial meeting on 12 September the expected report on the Lockheed study on US support for SUPER ANTELOPE has been received. The programme proposed for US support would imply a slippage of the SUPER ANTELOPE programme as a whole of about one year, though up to six months of this may be recoverable, but there remains a risk that the system may not be deployed continuously at sea until 1980. It is not possible at this early stage precisely to quantify the extent to which slippage may increase the overall cost, but we would not expect it to exceed some £5M to £10M for 6 months' delay. This expenditure would fall outside the critical years.

22. Due to the delay in taking a decision, it is now unlikely, if OPTION M were the preferred solution, that the continuous deployment of one SSBN on patrol armed with this missile could be achieved before mid 1981.

Note:

15. AUS(P & B) 209/73 dated 16 August 1973.

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Political and Economic Trends

23. The overall requirements of British Defence Policy and the particular need to maintain an independent strategic nuclear capability must be considered in the light of the changes which are taking place in political and economic affairs in Europe.

24. The effect of Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR), in whatever form they eventually emerge, would give the impression of a reduction in the need for military preparedness. The Conference on European Security and Cooperation (CSCE), while politically desirable, will inevitably support this view. The whole concept of detente, fostered by the non-aggression treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union which has been given greater emphasis by the US/Soviet agreement on the prevention of nuclear war, has promoted a euphoric atmosphere of greater security in Europe. These factors have already contributed to internal pressures in many NATO nations for reductions in military expenditure, and the consequences of such reductions can only be a lowering in the size or efficiency (or both) of NATO's forces.

25. There has also been a significant shift in the relationship of the United States to Europe. Although the US has supported the growth of the European Economic Community (EEC) so that an economically strong Europe can provide a bulwark against the spread of Communism, the EEC is developing as a trade competitor. Although the US provides military support for Europe, there is a growing internal demand for the reduction in numbers of US troops in Europe. The tendency must be towards a withdrawal of US military and financial support for Europe, with a consequent reduction in the credibility of the guarantee of the American nuclear umbrella.

Conventional Balance of Forces

26. These views on the effects which political developments will have on the credibility of the American nuclear guarantee are reinforced by recent US analyses placing increased emphasis on conventional forces. Our assessment (16) of NATO's conventional capability against full scale Warsaw Pact conventional aggression is that NATO could resist only for a matter of days before having to resort to the tactical use of nuclear weapons. SACEUR has taken the same view, and the NATO Military Authorities considered early this year (17) that the conventional imbalance had

Notes:

16. COS 27/73.
17. MCM/10/73 of 26 January 1973.

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reached a critical point, and, if present trends were not reversed, then, by 1980, the adverse balance in conventional forces could be so huge as to be irreversible. The US had until recently subscribed to this view in NATO, but some attempts are now being made to persuade the other Alliance nations that the conventional capability is far less favourable to the Warsaw Pact than previously assessed and that, given certain force improvements, Warsaw Pact conventional aggression could in the US view, be resisted for up to 60 days without resort to the use of nuclear weapons (18).

27. This change in the US view of the conventional balance in Europe emphasises the US self-interest in restricting any war in Europe to conventional fighting, however prolonged this may be. This must tend to increase the doubts in the minds of her Allies, and presumably also of the Warsaw Pact, of US willingness to escalate the conflict. This emphasises the importance of a European or non-US nuclear force.

FACTORS WHICH REMAIN CONSTANT

28.

RETAINED UNDER
SECTION 3(4)

Notes:

4. JIC(A)(72)30.
18. Para 15 of attachment to D/DS 22/13/15 dated 20 July 1973.
19.

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Need for Improvement

29. As neither the Soviet ABM defences nor the POLARIS Force capabilities have altered since the last assessment was made (6) the need for improvements to meet the criterion remains unchanged.

The US view of SUPER ANTELOPE

30. The United States authorities have been consistent in expressing the following views on SUPER ANTELOPE:

a. They would offer support and assistance up to the start of the system's development.

b. Despite a. SUPER ANTELOPE is essntially a UK project.

31. Support. In November 1972 it was reported (1) to the Prime Minister that the UK had been assured by the US Administration of their continued support for SUPER ANTELOPE and in September 1973 the Secretary of State told (20) Mr Schlesinger (US Secretary of Defence) that he was glad to be assured that the US would be happy to continue support for the SUPER ANTELOPE programme during the period of the UK's Ministerial deliberations.

32. UK Project. The US attitude in this respect is illustrated by a recent Department of Defence letter (21) to the Chief Scientific Adviser which, inter alia, stated:

"Dr Foster's letter of 18 October 1971 relating to US efforts in support of SUPER ANTELOPE said:

'Our role ..... is that of assisting you in certain areas. The UK has assumed and rightly so the role of principal design agent and primary responsibility for the programme's successful outcome accordingly rests with you. We, of course, will advise you of any moves which appear to us to deserve reconsideration but it is not our intent to undertake an independent evaluation/assessment of the overall system design'.

Notes:

1. S of S MO 18/1/1 dated 6 November 1973.
6. POPC 19/72 dated 7 September 1973.
20. S of S MO 18/1/1 dated 24 September 1973.
21. Director of Defence Research and Engineering letter dated 5 September 1973.

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This statement is still valid today. The US role in SUPER ANTELOPE must be viewed in the light of assisting in the development of a British weapon system."

33. The Risk. The US views on the risks associated with SUPER ANTELOPE (8) have remained essentially unchanged.

IMPLICATIONS OF NOT IMPROVING POLARIS

34. Although at present the radar coverage of the Soviet ABM system is incomplete and can be outflanked by deploying UK SSBN's in suitable operating areas, our intelligence assessment, as given in our advice to HMG (1), is that by 1974/5 the Russians will have extended their ABM radar arcs to cover missiles launched from these areas. There are other much less suitable submarine operating areas which could be used but even these are expected to be covered by the middle to late 1970s. Thus, unless Polaris is given an improved penetration capability, it will have effectively lost its credibility in our estimation by the late 1970s.

35. It can be argued, and the JIC take this line, that the Soviet leaders are less likely to be so well-informed as the UK of the technical details of Polaris. Moreover by inclination the Soviets are cautious and would be likely to credit the UK with a greater capability than we actually possess. Nevertheless, if they consider that the UK is not taking steps to improve its strategic weapon system, they may well calculate that their present or prospective ABM defences will suffice to keep out British missiles; indeed, their acceptance of a limit of 100 ABMs in defence of Moscow could be argued as a sign that they consider a defence of this size sufficient to defend their capital against British and French missiles, because it is certainly no defence against the numbers the United States could deploy.

36. It has been suggested that the judgement that the UK's national deterrent must be capable of penetrating the MOSCOW defences is false for the reason that "the Soviets might not

Notes:

1. S of S MO 18/1/1 dated 6 November 1972.
8. S of S MO 18/1/1 dated 8 June 1973.

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expend ABMs on UK missiles with the United States looking over their shoulder" (22). This view could only be accepted if one believed that the Soviet leaders did not wish to defend MOSCOW from destruction and had sited MOSCOW's ABM defences for an entirely different purpose.

37. RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3(4)

38. From the argument in the previous paragraphs there can be little doubt that, by the end of this decade, an unimproved Polaris system could not be relied upon to penetrate the Moscow area defences. Were the Russians to take the same view, the credibility of the national nuclear strategic deterrent would be correspondingly reduced.

SUMMARY

Rationale

39. We have previously said that the case for the United Kingdom's independent strategic nuclear deterrent capability lies under three main heads:

a. As the ultimate guarantee of national security and sovereignty.

b. As NATO's European contribution to the overall deterrent.

c. As conferring special status on Britain in Europe.

Notes:

1. S of S MO 18/1 dated 6 November 1972.
4. JIC(A)(72)30.
22. Head BDSM signal 282130 dated 28 September 1973.

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